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Cloak-and-Dagger Drama Of Spies Shocks Vienna

By Frederick Scheu
Special to the Herald Tribune
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CPYRGHT

A drama of spies and agents has shattered the calm of Vienna.

The central figure is Dr. Aurel Abranyi, a forty-seven-year-old Hungarian refugee, by profession, as far as one can tell, a prosperous publishing agent.

A few days ago he left his wife in his expensive flat in the center of Vienna to visit another Hungarian, a businessman named Laszlo Geroe, who lives in Budapest, but often comes on business to Vienna, where he has an apartment in a quiet suburban villa.

Dr. Abranyi did not return. The police, breaking into Geroe's apartment, found signs of a violent struggle, bloodstains on the furniture, a broken syringe with traces of a narcotic drug.

Two hours after the time of the presumed crime, Geroe had passed the Austro-Hungarian frontier in his car. By telephone from Budapest he insists he knows nothing.

Theories Constructed

This is the material on which the Vienna police and the public have been building theories.

To some it is clear that the disappearance of Dr. Abranyi is an incident in the East-West war of political agents.

It is said that Dr. Abranyi, since his escape from Hungary in 1947, had been in close touch with Radio Free Europe and other Western propaganda organizations. Geroe is said to have been an officer of the Hungarian Communist secret police.

Perhaps the most significant thing is the shock which the affair has caused.

Central Related

Cloak-and-dagger activities were quite common in the Austrian capital under four-power occupation ten years ago. But Viennese had come to think that these things belonged to the distant past.

changed news almost openly. Their activities were too valuable for their employees to be stopped. Among refugees and displaced persons, the netsam and jetsam of the post-war period, the agents flourished. And there were many Austrians tempted by the apparently easy way of making money by working for a foreign information service.

During the early post-war years many Austrians and refugees living in Vienna were kidnapped by the Russians, but toward the end of the occupation period this became rare and it was generally accepted that only "double agents" were in danger. The Austrian police publicly issued warnings against Austrians taking service with foreign espionage organizations.

But today, as then, the Austrian authorities are handicapped by the fact that while espionage against Austria is an indictable crime, espionage against any other country on Austrian territory can only be treated as a nuisance. At best a foreigner who has been proved a spy can be deported.

Few Were Touched

The great majority of refugees who have passed through Austria since 1945 have been, however, touched as little by the activities of the spies and agents as the great mass of the Austrian population. This applies both to the hundreds of thousands of "volksdeutsche" who came to Austria after being expelled from Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Yugoslavia because of their German nationality, and to the Hungarian refugees who passed through Austria after the Hungarian rising of 1956.

The "volksdeutsche" have become citizens and been absorbed in the Austrian population. The Hungarians, apart from a very small number, have left Austria and found homes elsewhere. Since the Iron Curtain came down again, few Hungarians have reached Austria.

Kidnap Is Rare

...because of the danger to their fellow persons.

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